

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 December 2016 at 7.00 pm**

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**Present:** Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), John Allen, Joycelyn Redsell, Graham Snell and Aaron Watkins

Anne Sentance, Church of England Representative

**Apologies:** Councillor Angela Sheridan  
Myra Potter, Parent Governor Representative

**In attendance:** Sonny Tipping, Youth Cabinet Representative  
Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services  
Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Social Care  
Alan Cotgrove, Business Manager, Local Safeguarding Children's Board  
Roger Edwardson, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills  
Neale Laurie, Safeguarding and Child Protection Coordinator & LADO  
Claire Pascoe, Child Sexual Exploitation Manager  
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for Virtual School  
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

### **19. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on the 13 October 2016, were approved as a correct record.

### **20. Items of Urgent Business**

The Chair asked Officers for an update on the Review of Children's Centre Services. Roger Edwardson stated that the review had only just been completed which consisted of numerous meetings being held across the borough, there had been 450 on-line responses and two petitions had been received. A consultation with staff will be undertaken in the New Year to which the findings can then be reported back to the committee. The Chair suggested that this item be added to the work programme for February 2017.

### **21. Declaration of Interests**

Anne Sentence, the co-opted member for the Church of England, resigned from the committee due to her moving out of the area. A new Church of

England representative would be made nominated for the February 2017 committee. The Chair stated that Anne had been a valued member of the committee and thanked Anne for all her contributions.

## **22. Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board**

No items were raised.

## **23. Items Raised by the Youth Cabinet Members**

The Chair welcomed Sonny Tipping to the Committee. Sonny Tipping stated that the Youth Cabinet's Youth Com had been a great success and that the Youth Cabinet had organised some working groups.

## **24. Ofsted Inspection Action Plan**

The Officer presented Members with an update on the Ofsted Inspection Action Plan and highlighted the updates on the 16 recommendations made by Ofsted in relation to the practice improvements that were required in Thurrock.

Councillor Redsell asked for clarification between a senior data analyst and a shadow senior data analyst. The Officer explained that there was a Performance Analyst Team which consisted of a strategic lead and four team members who undertook tasks within that team. This was a quality assurance and performance team covering the whole of children's services.

Councillor Watkins asked for clarification on recommendation 3 as between June and December 2016 the direction of travel had been maintained and not been considered as improving and was this a realistic timescale. The Officer stated that this was no longer a realistic timescale as this was due to being part of an innovation bid which had been made by a group of professionals who ran Signs of Safety as license trainers. They had applied to the Department for Education Innovation for Funding for money and await the outcomes of this bid which had therefore delayed the implementation of this action.

Councillor Redsell referred the Officers to recommendation 15 and asked had this been identified as feedback from families had not been received. The Officer stated that work was being undertaken with CORAM on the "Bright Spark" consultation and that independent surveys would be undertaken to understand how to consult better. The Officer stated that the efforts were evident and that plans were in place to engage with the community but it was how this should be evidenced better.

The Chair asked if some of the feedback received from recommendation 15 could be used to support recommendation 5. The Officer stated these two recommendations were linked and comments would be taken into consideration with recommendation 5 being signed off but with recommendation 15 having the need to be taken to the next level.

Councillor Watkins asked Officers that future reports be presented to Members.

Rory Patterson stated that the new Ofsted Framework had raised the bar for services and Thurrock would continue to improve and review the progress made and report back to committee as appropriate.

The Chair asked Officers for figures on the Staying Put Policy. The Officer confirmed that prior to the Ofsted Inspection and to date there were 7 children on the Staying Put Policy. The Officer stated that issues around payment would need to be addressed.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the report.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the current progress and direction of travel in completing the required actions.**
- 2. That the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive assurance that action plan will deliver the required improvement.**

## **25. Update Report On Child Sexual Exploitation**

The Officer presented the report to Members which highlighted the key strategic, operational, technological, partnership and practice developments that related to Child Sexual Exploitation as progressed by Thurrock Council. The Officer referred to the recommendations and stated that the post of a data analyst for Thurrock would work closely with the Police to work on child sexual exploitation, missing children and trafficking. This data analyst would be specifically just for Thurrock.

The Officer stated that she was trying to secure a visit from Emma Jackson, a child sexual exploitation survivor, to come to Thurrock to talk to councillors to engage in some child sexual exploitation discussions and training. The Officer stated that training was vital and that councillors played a key role in helping to embed recognition and how to respond appropriately.

A consultation between Thurrock, SERIC and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board will be undertaken with victims of child sexual exploitation.

The Officer stated that training played a vital part and had already been undertaken by:

- Thurrock Children's Social Care Staff
- Thurrock Foster Carers
- Thurrock Licenced Taxi Drivers and Passenger Assistants
- Thurrock Housing Staff
- General Practitioners

- Multi Agency Group

Councillor Redsell invited Claire Pascoe to speak to the Police and Crime Panel in Chelmsford.

Councillor Redsell asked the Officer would all taxi drivers have to undertake the training. The Officer stated that working with the Licensing Team and the Licensing Committee this training would become a condition of a license, therefore no training would mean no license.

The Chair thanked Officers for a well done report with some impressive measures and stated the next milestone would be for the 49 Thurrock Councillors to work together and undertake the relevant training.

The Chair asked who would fund the proposed data analyst position. The Officer stated that this would form part of the data performance team at no extra funding required from social care. The analyst would sit and work alongside the Police Community and focus on Thurrock areas.

Councillor Snell asked the Officers for a landscape view of child sexual exploitation in Thurrock. The Officer stated that this was an area that was still being understood and developed but as this was an open forum committee it would be inappropriate to go into too much detail.

Neale Laurie stated that there were no underlying issues in Thurrock and that these were isolated incidents and that work was being undertaken with the Police and the Community Partnerships.

Councillor Watkins asked how close Thurrock worked with other authorities. The Officer stated that they worked very close with Southend and Essex. Work was also undertaken within the Eastern Region and topics tended to be theme led. Information sharing was undertaken with local authorities and inviting members from the Eastern Region group to come to Thurrock to show them Thurrock's strategies.

Councillor Watkins asked whether Thurrock had reached out to other organisations such as bus companies, local shops and schools. The Officer stated that the Safeguard forums and "The Walk Online" roadshows were held yearly with the next one planned for March 2017 where 3,000 Year 5 pupils are invited to attend a half-day session. Adult versions of this training are also held quarterly but struggled to get parents to attend.

Anne Sentence asked had local churches been involved in any of the training as they had youth champions that would benefit from this. The Officer stated no but would obtain further details from Anne after the committee.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the Police and Community Safety to consider securing a data analyst for Thurrock, specifically to work on Child Sexual**

**Exploitation, missing children and child trafficking data. An analyst would work in collaboration with the Essex Police and would enable professionals to target resources efficiently and effectively.**

- 2. That the need to provide ongoing training and awareness session with Thurrock Councillors and be encouraged to fully engage in Child Sexual Exploitation training.**
- 3. That to strengthen Thurrock's response to victims, it was proposed that along with SERIC and the Local Safeguarding Board, consult further with victims of Child Sexual Exploitation to inform them of our strategic and operational planning.**

*Claire Pascoe and Neale Laurie left the Committee Room at 7.55pm.*

## **26. School Improvement Peer Review**

The Officer presented the report by explaining that the Eastern Region Peer Review sought to understand how Thurrock Council can continue and further develop its partnership with schools and academies to support improved outcomes and close performance gaps for all children and young people in Thurrock. In agreement with this review, Thurrock Council agreed to a set of three questions that would be used in all discussions and interviews in the course of the review. These questions were:

- What do schools and academies value most in the current support and challenge provided by the School Improvement Team.
- What was the role of schools and academies in the light of the white paper.
- What was the role of the council in supporting school improvement in the light of the white paper

The report explored the current performance context as at June 2016 and the strengths and areas for development linked to the overarching questions.

The Officer stated that there were 17,000 primary school places but only 10,000 places available in secondary schools in Thurrock and how the investment into Thurrock schools was vital with a further 1,000 children moving into the borough each year.

The Officer stated that work will continue to focus on the performance of vulnerable groups using data provided by the Schools Business Intelligence Team and work in partnership with schools who in turn will work with those under performing schools.

There was a good relationship between schools and the Council and this was supported by the Ofsted judgement.

Councillor Redsell asked the names of the two primary schools that required improvement. The Officer confirmed these were Stanford Le Hope Primary School and Bonnygate Primary School.

The Chair asked Officers whether any support from other local authorities had been taken up. The Officer confirmed that the focus had been on the support from Cambridgeshire where all secondary schools were academies and would engage in the local authority reviews and inspections to understand better.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. That a clear council-level analysis of performance data for all phases, including vulnerable groups was provided by the data support team and evaluate this analysis to drive strategic priorities and stakeholder understanding.**
- 2. That communication was clearly the council-wide school improvement priorities ensuring the golden thread between the data analysis, the Self Evaluation Form (SEF), the priorities for improvement, the 'Plan on a Page', the School Improvement Strategy and the Service Plan.**
- 3. That the co-define with schools the descriptors of both the future role of the council, schools and the Thurrock Education Alliance in a school-led system.**
- 4. That the develop and implement the council's monitoring role with all schools / MATs and governing boards, including the categorisation process, to ensure the council has a thorough overview of all schools.**
- 5. That the assurance to commission and broker support that meets the priorities for improvement for schools/academies and was regularly quality assured for impact.**
- 6. Develop a cross-service strategy to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups.**

## **27. Educational Attainments of Children Looked After**

The Officer presented the report that stated that raising achievement in all areas of education for Children Looked After remained a key priority for Thurrock Council and that the Virtual School monitored and supported the educational progress and outcomes for Children Looked After irrespectively of where they are placed in or out of borough. The Officer explained that the Virtual School was responsible for pupils aged between 3 years and 18 years and that included those children who had left care during an academic year.

The report included provisional outcomes for all pupils in the Virtual School cohort for the academic year 2015-16 and the year groups reported on were:

Early Years – Foundation Stage  
Year 1 (6 year old)  
KS1 (7 year old)  
KS2 (11 year old)  
KS4 (16 year old)

The Officer explained that the Good Level of Development measure was awarded at the end of the early years foundation stage and how performance compared of Thurrock Children Looked After against national and Thurrock non-Children Looked After pupils.

Councillor Snell asked whether the unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children may have contributed to the not so impressive results.

The Officer stated that year on year improvements had been made but the results were not where they should be for Children Looked After. The Officer referred Members to the Children Looked After outcomes against the total cohort and the outcomes for the 19 eligible Children Looked After students who were entered for GCSE for clarification.

The Chair commented on the success story of one pupil who had made three years' worth of progress in one academic year. The Officer stated that a huge amount of work had been undertaken with that pupil to get this result and that there were success stories in all years. The Officer confirmed that the Virtual School worked hard with all the Children Looked After and with the Foster Carers to ensure that support was given and that this will continue.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted the provisional outcomes of the summer 2016 tests and examinations and commends the pupils, their schools and parents/carers on their achievements.**
- 2. That the Committee recognised that data can't be compared to previous years due to a change in curriculum and assessments [particularly at Key Stage 1 and 2].**
- 3. That the Committee recognised that the cohorts of pupils are small and that this should be considered when comparing year on year data.**
- 4. That the Committee recognised that the length of time in care can affect the progress and outcomes of the pupils.**

*Keeley Pullen left the committee room at 8.20pm.*

- 28. Thurrock Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LSCB), Serious Case Review (SCR) Report - James**

The Officer presented the report that included a summary which was provided to the Local Children's Safeguarding Board. The Officer stated under regulation 5 of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board Regulations 2006 set out the requirements for Local Safeguarding Children's Board to undertake this serious case review and to learn from the findings. The report was published on the Thurrock web site from the 1 December 2016 and will remain on there for 18 months. The same report will be published on the NSPCC national website.

All members agreed that the findings of this report were tragic and heart rendering to read.

Councillor Redsell stated how hard it was to understand how no one picked up the signs especially his family and professionals. It was a shame that we had to learn from the death of a child. The Officer stated there were elements of the report that were not predicted, some indicators were there but not seen easily. The Officer stated that the family had been very supportive in the review and that good work had been undertaken by social care.

Andrew Carter stated that there had been a very good relationship with the family, the social worker and the Independent Reviewing Officer and that the professionals had done everything they could.

The Chair asked if James was on probation and would this been a way of Thurrock being informed of his absences. The Officer confirmed that James was not known to probation.

Rory Patterson stated that James would have been involved in the Youth Offending Service and in hindsight lessons could have been learnt from previous reviews.

Councillor Redsell stated that the Police and Crime Panel were looking at how gang activities could be addressed and disrupted before they took hold.

Councillor Watkins asked Officers why other police authorities had not reported back to Thurrock following the arrests. The Officer stated that the report highlighted different police authorities but James had given an address outside of Thurrock therefore Thurrock would not have been made aware. The Intelligence systems and ATHENA were being improved to provide a better information system. The Officer stated that if James had been in the system he might have been picked up.

The Officer confirmed that James had only one return home interview in January 2015 which had been voluntarily.

Councillor Watkins asked Officers if they were working in safety partnership with the Essex Fire Authority. The Officer stated that the Essex Fire Authority were undertaking training programmes in schools.

The Chair requested that an Update on Serious Case Review Action Plan for James be presented at February 2017 committee.

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the report of the LSCB, its findings and its recommendations.**
- 2. That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee track progress by Children's Services in responding to the recommendations of the review.**
- 3. That the Serious Case Review Action Plan for James be presented at the February 2017 committee.**

#### **29. Performance Dashboard**

The Officer introduced the report and stated that the Performance Dashboard was created to set out and provide members with a range of performance data and measures for Children's Social Care. A Improvement Plan Overview Group had been established to provide an additional layer of oversight and challenge to ensure Officers maintain high ambitions for the service and improvements are implemented with pace.

All members agreed that it was a comprehensive report and that the Performance Dashboard had the option to be adapted. Members requested that they are kept updated on progress.

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider if current dashboard covers the areas that the committee wished to focus on and identified any other areas for scrutiny.**
- 2. That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee received assurance as to the current functioning and performance of Children's Social Care.**
- 3. That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified any areas that they would require a "deep dive" analysis of.**

#### **30. Work Programme**

The work programme was discussed and agreed:

- That the item on Review of the Children Service Centres be added to the work programme for February 2017.

- That the item on Ofsted Improvement Plan be added to the work programme for February 2017.
- That the item on Action Plan for Thurrock Local Children's Safeguarding Board, Serious Case Review Report - James - be added to the work programme for February 2017.
- That the Anti-Bullying Prevention at Primary Schools and the Anti-Bullying Policy be merged into one report for the February 2017 committee.
- That the item on Thurrock Local Children's Safeguarding Board, Serious Case Review Report - Harry - be added to the work programme for the next municipal calendar.

**The meeting finished at 9.00 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**